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"THE RIGHTS OF THE BABIES" *

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A POSTCARD greeting once brought me this message: "Shine! for another life may borrow from your lamp a kindly ray." If I am able to send out even one little glimmer of light, though it be only a reflected ray, I shall feel repaid for this effort and will try not to weary you too much with the coos and cries of my blessed babies.

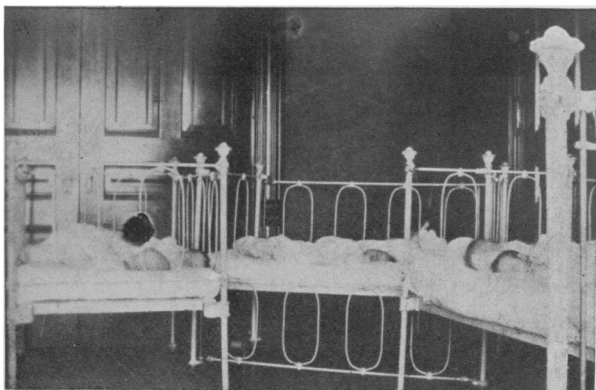
I am aware that this subject is not a popular one with the majority of nurses. They may see interesting possibilities in one well-kept, properly nourished baby, but the pathetic setting of a group of motherless infants whose only nourishment is supplied by the dear old "moo cow" through the agency of a few spinster nurses whose greatest anxiety is to have everything in use "surgically clean," even to the baby's thumb before putting it into his mouth, as babies sometimes will, you know—this does not appeal to the average nurse.

This subject, in itself, may seem somewhat sentimental, but I hope to prove to you who are open to conviction that the work among infants and young children is not all a mere sentiment, but, on the contrary, that it is *very real* and that it has a deeper and more practical side. It is an ever-increasing and most perplexing problem which every true nurse should be ready and willing to meet and help to solve, and whether success or failure crown her efforts in the struggle to prolong the frail little life entrusted to her care, she at least "hath done what she could"—*her duty*.

Some one has said that a woman is far more competent with a baby on her lap. If this be true why should she not be still more competent with thirteen or sixteen babies on her lap?

During my past three years in this work, the experiences and revelations have been many and varied, but the end is not yet. We are still in the kindergarten. The one thing which will help to prevent our growing bitter and resentful is the soul-light in the sixteen pairs of baby eyes looking up into ours, and with mute appeal saying, "We are here,—will *you* help to take care of us?" Then the grateful baby

* Read at the St. Barnabas Alumnae banquet, June, 1909.



A CORNER OF THE NURSERY.



A GROUP ON THE LAWN.

smile at every gentle touch or care. Do you think you could resist sixteen smiles all at once?

Many of our visitors, in passing through the baby cottage, are impressed with the pathetic side only. The sight of these helpless little ones appeals to their sympathy. Yet how many, do you suppose, would be willing to deny themselves some pleasure to insure the future happiness and comfort of even *one* baby? As they look upon these infants in their happy, contented state, they may commend the work in general, but they have not the slightest conception of the incessant labor and nervous energy required to make this transformation.

A great philosopher once asked, "What's the good of a new-born child?" He may have given less thought to the possibilities of our blessed babes than did his grandmother or even his spinster aunts. As well ask, "What's the good" of a new-born anything? A thought, an idea, a plan,—everything must have a birth, a development, and a destiny. These infants are placed in our hands. We accept them cheerfully and reverently, with the firm conviction that every little child born into the world has a divine right to its existence, no matter what may be its environment or heritage. Our duty is to use every means in our power to sustain and strengthen the little life and to supplement, as far as possible, what has been denied it by its natural parents. Our part is to take care of the growth and development. In due time we send them out into the world to make a place for themselves, leaving the destiny in the hands of the great, wise, and tender Guardian who, Himself, once lay in the humblest cradle.

After you have seen and actually handled these frail little specimens of humanity,—not simply one by one, but by the dozens, group after group,—when you have watched them hour by hour and day by day, looking for even the slightest improvement, you will begin to understand in a measure what an endless task you have before you and what infinite patience and courage must be required to keep you *always* at the post of duty.

You may wonder how we are able to train and discipline so many and at such an early age. Here again we meet with difficulties and discouragements. Criticisms and false impressions must be met and overcome. The nurse is subjected to a regular catechism, but strange to say she never seems to know the correct answer to this list of questions. We *must be* persistent in what we believe to be the right course, and every success gives us new courage to persevere in our efforts. We insist upon regularity in the daily routine of feeding, bathing, rest, and exercise. Some one sarcastically remarked that, "They even have a

regular time each day to nibble their crusts." This occurred a year ago. The *fact* still remains, but *not* the sarcasm, not the author of it.

The hardest and most important factor in the whole problem of baby work is the wet nurse. If you have never had to deal with her you cannot appreciate the infinite tact and patience necessary to keep her in proper condition, mentally, morally, and physically, in order that she may perform the function required of her; to teach her the dignity and sacredness of her position and her relation to the infants who depend upon her for nourishment. You may have your own standard—your own ideal; make it just as high as possible for yourself, but do not be disappointed if all others fail to reach the same high level. In time, however, this, too, becomes one of the most interesting features of the work, and always leads us out to the same practical though pathetic thought,—the baby needs its own mother, and in order to thrive well must have its own natural food.

By the employment of these unfortunate young women we seem to be using one evil to overcome another, yet, if properly directed, both parties may be greatly benefited by the arrangement.

The prevention of infant mortality and infanticide are problems the solution of which will go hand in hand with the warfare upon tuberculosis, venereal diseases, and other social evils, and we, as nurses and the natural reformers among women, should use our influence in helping to create a public sentiment against these evils which will be stronger than any *written* law. We may need to dig deep into the mire at times, but we have only to be true to ourselves and our own womanhood and the clay will fall from our hands, leaving them cleaner and purer than before. Here again the pure light from the baby eyes gives us new courage to go forward and renew our battle for right and justice.

Emerson says: "To believe your own thoughts, to believe that what is true in your own heart is true for all mankind,—this is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it will become the universal sense. For the inmost in due time becomes the outmost."

It may require many little "Davids" to slay with his slingshot the modern "Goliath" who is responsible for these great and terrible evils, but at least we must do what we can to save these little "Davids" while we have them with us and in time they may become our strongest and safest allies.